

THE INDEPENDENT

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Writer twists Carroll's tale in revenge attack on Alice

BY LOUISE JURY, ARTS CORRESPONDENT

The original Alice was a flaxen-haired innocent in a whimsical world of Mad Hatters, mock turtles and Cheshire Cats. But in a move that has upset traditionalists, Frank Beddor, the American producer of the gross-out movie *There's Something About Mary*, has transformed Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* into a dark and violent tale of murder and war.

Beddor said his novel, *The Looking Glass Wars*, was prompted by his hatred of the "terrible girls' book" he was forced to read by his mother and grandmother as a child.

Several of Britain's best-loved children's authors, and the Lewis Carroll Society, are questioning the wisdom of reworking the greats of English literature, including *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*.

In the book, for release in Britain in September, Beddor turns the children's classic on its head, claiming it was never a story devised by the Reverend Charles Dodgson for his charming young friend, Alice Liddell. Mr Beddor said: "After a stunning discovery and exhaustive research, I have unmasked what I believe is the ultimate literary lie, a twisted fabrication that has existed for nearly 150 years. Lewis Carroll did not tell Alice Liddell the story of Wonderland, she told him. And Alice Liddell was not who she appeared to be."

Beddor, a 35-year-old former ski champion, stunt double and actor, claimed Alice in Wonderland was really Alyss Heart, an orphan whose story is much nastier than the sanitised version Mr Dodgson published in 1864 under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll. In this rewriting, also to be made into a film and games, the Cheshire Cat is a vicious assassin and the White Rabbit figure certainly never graces a tea-party. Alyss, a future Queen of Wonderland in exile, is disgusted at the nonsensical idea perpetrated by Mr Dodgson that she fell down a rabbit hole.



Queen Genevieve Heart, from an old playing card, who is featured in Frank Beddor's rewrite of Lewis Carroll.



Judith Kerr, the creator of the Mog stories, said: "I think it's an absolutely terrible idea to take anything good that someone has written and rewrite it. Words fail me. I don't want to be unkind to whoever, but if they want to write a book, let them think up their own story and not mess about with one that has been done extremely well."

Jacqueline Wilson said it could be brilliant. "But anybody that says I'm going to re-work Jane Austen or Shakespeare is being very bold and setting themselves up for people to be very iffy. I feel slightly anxious about this because it is so much part of the English literature tradition. When

you think of *Alice in Wonderland*, you think Oxford and tradition and when in the same sentence you're saying video games, I think, maybe not. But nowadays, sadly, I don't think the average eight-nine-10-year-old has read *Alice*."

Michael Morpurgo, the children's laureate, said some great works of Shakespeare were adaptations of earlier pieces, and there was nothing wrong with the process in principle. But he added: "*Alice* is such a strong story in the culture of the world, in the English language certainly, that if you're not careful, you're on a hiding to nothing. The picture of Alice and her view of the adult world and the way she stands up against it is so potent, it may be difficult. For me, I would say leave it well alone. To take it and twist and turn it and dump the bits you don't like? We all know this book and we all love it, so I think I would say, 'Please don't mess with it'. But it entirely depends whether he brings it off."

The idea came to Beddor when he saw a pack of old playing cards with Wonderland-esque figures in the British Museum while visiting London for the premiere of *Something About Mary* five years ago.

This first volume of what is intended as a trilogy for children aged nine to 16 will be published in September, with movie versions being negotiated.

Beddor said: "I guess I didn't realise how beloved Lewis Carroll's classic was. I was just seeking revenge. My grandmother and my mother made me read this book when I was 10 or 11 and I thought it was a terrible girls' book. This is my revenge; I wanted to rewrite it as a book boys would also enjoy."



Michael Morpurgo, left, says Frank Beddor, right, is on a hiding to nothing with his reworking of 'Alice'.